



In Touch South India

Headlines from the U.S. Consulate General Chennai



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<http://chennai.usconsulate.gov>

Nonviolence Today

When American civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., along with his wife Coretta Scott King, landed in India in February 1959, he said that he had come “as a pilgrim” to learn more about the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. A month later, he described his journey as “eye-opening.” In fact, the visit which took the Kings all over India left a deep impression on Dr. King, informed his political views and influenced his subsequent actions, ultimately leading to a transformation of American society.

On the 50th anniversary of the Kings’ historic visit to India, their son Mr. Martin Luther King III retraced their steps in places like Thiruvananthapuram and Chennai. In meetings with officials, religious leaders, students and people from all walks of life, Mr. King noted that his father returned to the United States in 1959 more convinced than ever of the power of non-violence and that the struggle of African-Americans was inextricably linked to the struggles of other oppressed people around the world.

“An eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind” expresses for Mr. King the inutility of the path of violence for those seeking social change. The aim of nonviolence is not to hurt or humiliate the oppressor, but to convert him while defeating the evil system he operates. Mr. King often quotes his father’s 1963 “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” which seems to be inspired by his earlier visit to India: “Injustice anywhere is a

threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

Mr. King loved to meet with students and advised them to “realize the dream” of their forebears, a dream expressed eloquently by Mr. King’s father of a world in which people are not judged by the color of their skin or the community to which they belong, “but by the content of their character.” He urged the youth to renounce all forms of violence and to unite behind nonviolent means to correct the ills of their society.



Martin Luther King III interacts with students at Padma Seashadri Bala Bhavan, Chennai. Photo credit: Dinamani.

The Consulate General approached three great Indian artists – Kamal Haasan, A.R. Rahman and Vairamuthu – to ask them to help us to commemorate the Kings’ visit of 50 years ago. Each artist not only said yes, but embraced the task wholeheartedly, mounting in Chennai on February 25 a spectacular performance of “The Living Dream,” a tribute to the lives and legacies of Gandhi and King. With words, music and film, the artists demonstrated how the two great leaders used the

power of nonviolence to change their respective countries and bring freedom, justice and dignity to millions. The job is not finished, however; much remains to be done before we can say that we have finally erased the superficial distinctions that continue to keep us needlessly and cruelly divided.

American Library Now Open on Saturdays!

Beginning April 11, the American Library in the U.S. Consulate General, Gemini Circle, Chennai, is open every Saturday from 9:30 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. In addition, the United States-India Educational Foundation (USIEF) is open at the same address on the second and fourth Saturdays of every month to provide information on higher education in the United States. Please join us!



In bidding farewell to Martin Luther King III as he embarked on his commemorative journey to India, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton noted that the trip to India of Mr. King’s parents, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mrs. Coretta Scott King, 50 years before was “a testament to the bonds of affection and shared history between our two nations.” The enthusiasm and warmth with which

Mr. King was received in February 2009 demonstrates that these bonds are now stronger than ever.

When I last wrote in this space, I referred to President Obama’s sense of purpose in meeting the challenges facing the world today. He recognizes that America’s success depends on listening to others. Accordingly, we are seeking your views on the President’s policies and actions. See the box at the bottom of page 4 on how you can take part in a global conversation.

- Andrew T. Simkin, Consul General

U.S. Sailors and Coast Guardsmen in Kochi

About 500 sailors and Coast Guardsmen from the U.S. Navy destroyer USS The Sullivans and the U.S. Coast Guard cutter USCGC Boutwell, respectively, de-



USS The Sullivans

USCGC Boutwell



scended on Kochi during the week of February 16 for a scheduled port visit. The USS The Sullivans is named after the five Sullivan brothers who were killed in action during the

Battle of Guadalcanal in World War II. The USCGC Boutwell serves a wide range of missions including search and rescue, law enforcement, maritime security, protection of natural resources and national defense.

The men and women of the two ships used their time ashore to meet their Indian counterparts, play basketball, conduct community service projects, such as painting a local school, and generally experience the rich culture of Kerala. For one American sailor, though, Trinadadian-born Electrician's Mate 1st Class Phil Rahim, the visit held a special meaning: his great-grandfather came from India. Mr. Rahim, who had not been to India before, said, "I was excited to see where it all started."

Small Space, Large Impact

On February 18, Consul General Andrew T. Simkin cut the ribbon to inaugurate the newly renovated Educational Advising Service Center of the United States-India Educational Foundation



Consul General Simkin welcomes visitors to USIEF's Educational Advising Service Center.

Foundation (USIEF), Chennai. The room which is entered through the American Library now has a contemporary, open and friendly ambience that says "Welcome!" to students seeking information about higher education in the United States.

Mr. Simkin noted that in an age when national borders are becoming less of a factor in our economic and personal lives, international education is being more sought after than before. For those considering studying in the U.S., the Center with its highly trained and experienced staff is the best place for comprehensive information and objective advice. He told visiting students and Fulbright Scholars that USIEF through the Center was making real the dream and vision of Senator J. William Fulbright "to expand boundaries of human wisdom, empathy and perception through education."

Positive Images



Consulate employees wish composer A.R. Rahman good luck on the eve of his departure for Los Angeles to attend the Academy Awards ceremony.



The Washington DC/Baltimore-based Duende Quartet put on an unforgettable show on March 13 at the Museum Theatre, Chennai.



Consul General Simkin discusses a panel of the photo exhibit "Journeys Toward Freedom" with school boys at Sri Krishna Sweets, Chennai.

Celebrate Life

Over 300 children from all over India participated in an international poster competition on the theme of "Celebrate Life," an initiative of the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). The Consulate General – Chennai in asso-



A



B

- A. Babu, Age 7
Bangalore
- B. D. Jaikira, Age 9
Chennai
- C. G. Nitish, Age 9
Chennai
- D. Bhavana Subramaniam, Age 13
Chennai
- E. S. Varsh, Age 13
Chennai



C



D



E

ciation with the Madras Christian Council of Social Services selected the best posters from South India and displayed them at the Ispahani Centre, Chennai, on Valentine's Day. Judges in New Delhi then chose nine winners for all of India, five of whom are from Chennai and Bangalore. These posters now go to Washington where they will be displayed and compete with entries from other countries.

Raising awareness and battling stigma can have a dramatic impact on HIV prevalence rates. The children's art thus saves lives while celebrating life, love and togetherness. And the children revealed through their art a capacity for compassion and cheerful optimism that adults would do well to emulate.

Consular Corner:

Consulate General Hyderabad Begins Issuing Visas

On March 4, U.S. Consul General Cornelis M. Keur proclaimed the Consulate General in Hyderabad "open for consular services." The Consular Section is now accepting visa interview appointments for those wishing to travel to the United States. Full consular services for American citizens are also available. The Consul General stated that his well-trained staff would begin conducting 100 visa interviews a day -- a number scheduled to increase to 400 per day by the end of April.

Visa applicants and American citizens are now spared the lengthy and costly journey to Chennai. Residents of Andhra Pradesh who wish to schedule a visa interview appointment should log on to VFS at <http://www.vfs-usa.co.in>. Appointments will be scheduled by date and time. Applicants will need to state the objective of their travel: pleasure, business, studies, employment or other. On the day of the appointment, applicants should arrive no more than half an hour before the scheduled time. For more information, see <http://hyderabad.usconsulate.gov>



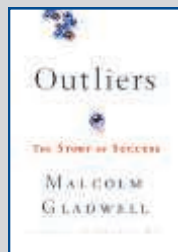
The first visa in Hyderabad fittingly went to Salauddin Khan (center) whose great-grandfather built the Paigah Palace, where the Consulate General is housed. Consular officers Mark Leoni at left and Fred Stern at right.

The Consulate General in Hyderabad will serve applicants from the State of Andhra Pradesh. Residents of Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu should continue to apply at the Consulate General in Chennai.

What We Read

Daniel G. Keen
Vice Consul

Outliers
by Malcom Gladwell



Which factors help to make an extraordinary individual stand so far out from the rest of humanity in a certain arena that s/he would be considered a statistical outlier? Malcolm Gladwell argues that in addition to intelligence, talent, hard work and perseverance, many high-achieving people owe much of their success to environmental factors and timing. Gladwell offers compelling evidence that someone's birth date matters a great deal when it is compared against cut-off dates for schools and athletic teams because they might enter a group as the most mature or the least developed member and that this small initial difference is magnified over time. This catalytic book is likely to change the way readers think about life, parenting and their own achievements.

Kristen L. Fresonke
Vice Consul

Train to Pakistan
by Khushwant Singh



Peaceful Sikhs and Muslims, living along the Pakistan border, collide with history when Partition becomes a flashpoint for communal riots. No one in the fictional village of Mano Majra quite understands the magnitude of the changes engulfing them. To the end, the village elder insists: "By next week we will all be drinking from the same pitcher again." Small matters of loyalty and jealousy, such as a secret love affair between a Sikh pickpocket and a Muslim girl, are implicated in the seismic disruption of British withdrawal, Indian independence and the creation of Pakistan. When a massacre is planned against the refugees leaving on the train to Pakistan, author Singh suggests that doing nothing to prevent a crime is one of the worst crimes of all.

On Religious Pluralism

Though rooted in their respective religious traditions, both Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. were respectful of all religious faiths and in fact had friends and close colleagues of many religious and cultural backgrounds. This was one of the messages of Professor Sudarshan Kapur, founder of the Peace Studies Department at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado, who delivered a series of lectures in India as part of the 50th anniversary celebration of Dr. King's "pilgrimage" to India.

Author of the book, "Raising Up a Prophet: The African-American Encounter With Gandhi," Professor Kapur is an expert on the influence that the Indian struggle for independence, and specifically the method of nonviolence, had on the U.S. civil rights movement in the 20th Century. He spoke at a variety of venues in India, including at the Indian Institute of World Culture, Bangalore, in the very hall where Dr. King had spoken 50 years earlier. There, and in Mysore and Chennai, Professor Kapur was asked about religion and the spiritual element in the nonviolent struggle for freedom.

Professor Kapur noted that while King talked about love and Gandhi about truth,



Professor Kapur at the American Corner, Bangalore..

both stood for religious pluralism. Neither was impressed by shows of piousness but thought that believers should "go out into the world" and fight for justice. Professor Kapur said that religious faith helped many in freedom struggles to "move through the morass that surrounded them, combat disillusionment and find a sense of purpose and hope." But there was room in Gandhi's and King's movements for people of all religious affiliations and for nonbelievers as well.

Gandhi's advice to American Christian missionary E. Stanley Jones in 1915 is instructive. Dr. Jones wrote that Gandhi had told him not just to worship Jesus, but to follow him; to practice his religion without adulterating it; to keep love central and to spread it; and to study other religions with sympathy. Dr. King, when he became a Gandhian many years later, developed the notion of the "beloved community" committed to nonviolence and bringing together people of all faith traditions. Throughout his life as a civil rights leader, Dr. King built bridges across religious divides. Professor Kapur stressed the importance that both Gandhi and King placed on acceptance of religious and other differences between people as an essential element of a free and just society.

My Culture + Your Culture = ?

Bijoy Thangaraj, a software engineer working for Honeywell Technology Solutions in Bangalore, emerged as one of four worldwide winners of the U.S. State Department's global online video contest called "My Culture + Your Culture = ?" His prize is a two-week all-expenses-paid trip to the United States to explore his interest in promoting tolerance through the arts.

Mr. Thangaraj, the composer of the music and lead singer, is



The Stunning Six, with Bijoy Thangaraj at center, enjoy a celebratory dinner at Villa Pottipatti, Bangalore.

quick to acknowledge that production of the three-minute video was in fact a group effort involving six friends, all employees of Honeywell.

It started when Subapriya N. spotted a newspaper announcement of the contest just three weeks before the deadline for entries. She, Mr. Thangaraj, Aurovind R., Gitesh Joshi, Deepika Gulati and Ramesh Murugan, who good-naturedly call themselves "The Stunning Six," then set out to write lyrics, compose music, collect images, sing, dance, film and edit all in the hours after they finished their jobs. For three weeks they got little sleep, and on the last day, in order to meet the deadline, they worked on the video for 24 hours nonstop.

When we met with The Stunning Six in Bangalore on March 19, they all said that the effort had been worth it – not just because they won the prize with a message of peace, but because the long hours of working together cemented the friendship of six young adults from all over India, from different cultural and religious backgrounds, and whose only common language is English. In fact, they pointed out, they themselves embody the theme of the video contest, i.e., people from different cultures coming together. You can view their video, which they call "My Culture + Your Culture = World of Wonder," along with the other prize-winning videos, at <http://exchanges.state.gov>.

Let the President Know!

What do you think about President Obama's policies and initiatives during his first 100 days in office? Now you can access the new "First 100 Days" blog at www.america.gov, which will allow you to participate in a daily global discussion on U.S. policies on the economy, energy, environment and foreign affairs. Make a difference; give us your ideas!